THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes. The UK amended immigration laws for Highly-Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP) visa holders in 2006 and has launched a point-based system for foreign workers in 2008.

(b) No.

(c) Yes. The issue has been taken up in bilateral discussions with the UK authorities.

(d) The UK Government have launched a new comprehensive point-based system for foreign workers with the first stage of the system becoming operational on 29 February 2008. The system is to be introduced in stages to streamline more than 80 existing routes of entry into 5 broad categories for non-EU workers. Each of the 5 tiers will have different conditions, entitlements and entry clearance checks. As a first stage, Tier-1 for highly skilled workers will replace the erstwhile HSMP, and has been implemented in India from 1st April 2008. Other tiers will be implemented between the autumn 2008 and spring 2009.

(e) The HSMP visa issue have been taken up through the Indian High Commission in the UK. The Government have no record of petitions/representations filed by the Indian immigrants to the UK authorities.

International conference for expanding United Nations

†707.SHRI MANOHAR JOSHI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that an international conference is likely to be held in September next year in India;

(b) if so, the aim of that conference;

(c) whether the conference would include all those countries who want expansion of the United Nations; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Government do not propose to convene an international conference in India on the subject of expansion of the United Nations.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Steps for expanding UNSC

†708.SHRI MANOHAR JOSHI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state the steps taken as well as proposed to be taken in the near future to expedite expansion of the United Nations Security Council?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): The expansion of the Security Council is being discussed in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) where India is playing a major and proactive role. India will continue its efforts in forthcoming discussions in the UNGA.

Permanent membership for Security Council

709. MS. SUSHILA TIRIYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(a) whether it is a fact that India's chances of inclusion in the Security Council as permanent member is being, time and again scuttled by a neighbouring country; and

(b) if so, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) There is increasing recognition internationally of the strength of India's candidacy for permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council.

Indian workers in Gulf countries

710. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware of the studies appearing in electronic media that the present global financial crisis had adversely affected Indian citizens working in the Gulf countries and they would be forced to return to India;

(b) if so, the details including number of Indian citizens working in various Gulf countries as on today, State-wise, category-wise;

(c) if so, the steps taken, if any, to improve the living conditions of the above citizens at their work place in the light of above financial crisis; and

(d) if so, the steps taken and projects envisaged if any, to rehabilitate above citizens in the eventuality of their return?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (d) The Indian Missions in Gulf countries have reported that they have not come across any adverse impact on Indian citizens working in the Gulf countries as a result of the current global financial crisis so as to force them to return to India.

Indians in jail overseas

711. SHRI SU. THIRUNAVUKKARASAR: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any information with the Ministry about the overseas Indians jailed in various countries; and

(b) if so, the steps taken by the Ministry to get all of them released?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) The requisite details are being collected from Indian Missions /Posts abroad and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Plight of Gulf bound passengers

712. SHRI NANDI YELLAIAH: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Gulf bound passengers are posing serious problems to immigration officials at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport at Shamshabad, Hyderabad and the Airport is flooded with complaints related to documents being carried by passengers;

(b) if so, the details of action taken so far by the Union Government;